OBSERVATIONS ON THE 22. STANZA IN THE 9th. *CANTO* OF the 2d. Book of SPENCERS Faery Queen.

Full of excellent Notions concerning the Frame of Man, and his rationall Soul.

Written by the Right Noble and Illustrious Knight Sir *Kenelme Digby*, at the request of a Friend.

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OBSERVATIONS
on the 22. *Stanza* in the 9th. Canto of the 2d. Book of SPENCERS Faery Queene, written by the Requeſt of a Friend.

My moſt honour'd Friend,

Am too well acquainted with the weakneſſes of mine abilities (far unfit to undergo ſuch a Task as I have in hand) to flatter my ſelf with the hope I may either inform your underſtanding, or do my ſelf honour by what I am to write. But I am ſo deſirous you ſhould be poſſeſt with the true knowledge of what a bent will I have upon all occaſions to do you ſer-

vice, that obedience to your command weigheth much more with me, then the lawfulneſſe of any excuſe can, to preſerve me from giving you in writing ſuch a teſtimonie of my ignorance and erring Phantaſie as I fear this will prove. Therefore without any more circumſtance, I will, as I can, deliver to you in this paper, what th'other day I diſcourſed to you upon the 22. Staffe of the ninth *Canto* in the ſecond Book of that matchleſſe Poem, *The Faery Queen*, written by our Engliſh *Virgil*; whoſe words are theſe:

The Frame thereof ſeem'd partly Circular,
And part Triangular: O work divine!
Thoſe two the firſt and laſt proportions are;
The one, imperfect, mortall, feminine;
Th'other immortal, perfect, maſculine; (Baſe,
And twixt them both a Quadrate was the
Proportion'd equally by ſeven and nine;
Nine was the Circle ſet in Heavens place,
All which compacted made a goodly Diapaſe.

In

In this Staffe the Author ſeems to me to proceed in a different manner from what he doth elſewhere generally through his whole Book. For in other places, although the beginning of his Allegory or myſticall ſenſe, may be obſcure, yet in the proceſſe of it, he doth himſelf declare his own conceptions in ſuch ſort as they are obvious to any ordinarie capacitie: But in this, he ſeems onely to glance at the profoundeſt notions that any Science can deliver us, and then on a ſudden (as it were) recalling himſelf out of an Enthuſiaſme, he returns to the gentle Relation of the Allegoricall Hiſtory he had begun, leaving his Readers to wander up and down in much obſcuritie, & to come within much danger of erring at his Intention in theſe lines? Which I conceive to be dictated by ſuch a learned Spirit, and ſo generally a knowing Soul, that were there nothing elſe extant of *Spencers* writing, yet theſe few words would make me eſteeme him no whit inferiour to the moſt famous

mous men that ever have been in any age: as giving an evident teſtimonie herein, that he was throughly verſt in the Mathematicall Sciences, in Philoſophy, and in Divinity, to which this might ſerve for an ample Theme to make large Commentaries upon. In my praiſes upon this ſubject, I am confident that the worth of the Author will preſerve me from this Cenſure, that my Ignorance onely begets this Admiration, ſince he hath written nothing that is not admirable. But that it may appear I am guided ſomewhat by my own Judgement (tho' it be a meane one) and not by implicite Faith, and that I may in the beſt manner I can, comply with what you expect from me, I will no longer hold you in ſuſpenſe, but begin immediately, (tho' abruptly) with the declaration of what I conceive to be the true ſenſe of this place, which I ſhall not go about to adorne with any plauſible diſcourſes, or with Authorities and examples drawne from others writings (ſince my want both

both of conveniency and learning would make me fall very ſhort herein) but it ſhall be enough for me to intimate mine own conceptions, and offer them up to you in their own ſimple and naked form, leaving to your better Judgement the examination of the weight of them, and after peruſall of them, beſeeching you to reduce them and me if you perceive us erring.

Tis evident that the Authors intention in this *Canto* is to deſcribe the bodie of a man inform'd with a rationall ſoul, and in proſecution of that deſigne he ſets down particularly the ſeverall parts of the one and of the other: But in this *Stanza* he comprehends the generall deſcription of them both, as (being joyned together to frame a compleat Man) they make one perfect compound, which will the better appear by taking a ſurvey of every ſeverall clauſe thereof by it ſelf.

"*The Frame thereof seemd partly Circular,*
"*And part Triangular*——

By these Figures, I conceive that he means the mind and body of Man; the first being by him compared to a Circle, and the latter to a Triangle. For as a Circle of all Figures is the most perfect, and includeth the greatest space, and is every way full and without Angles, made by the continuance of one onely line: so mans soul is the noblest and most beautifull Creature, that God hath created, and by it we are capable of the greatest gifts that God can bestow, which are Grace, Glory, and Hypostaticall Union of the Humane nature to the Divine, and she enjoyeth perfect freedome and libertie in all her Actions, and is made without composition, which no Figures are that have Angles (for they are caus'd by the coincidence of severall lines) but of one pure substance which was by God breath'd into a Body made of such compounded

pounded earth as in the preceding *Stanza* the Author deſcribes. And this is the exact Image of him that breathed it, repreſenting him as fully as *tis* poſſible for any creature which is infinitely diſtant from a Creator. For, as God hath neither beginning nor ending: ſo, neither of theſe can be found in a Circle, although that being made of the ſucceſſive motion of a line, it muſt be ſuppoſed to have a beginning ſomewhere: God is compared to a Circle whoſe Center is every where, but his circumference no where: But mans ſoul is a Circle, whoſe circumference is limited by the true center of it, which is onely God. For as a circumference doth in all parts alike reſpect that indiviſible Point, and as all lines drawn from the inner ſide of it, do make right Angles within it, when they meet therein: ſo all the interiour actions of mans ſoul ought to have no other reſpective Point to direct themſelves unto, but God; and as long as they make right Angles, which is, that they keep the exact

act middle of virtue, and decline not to either of the sides where the contrary vices dwell, they cannot fail, but meet in their Center. By the Triangular Figure he very aptly designes the body: for as the Circle is of all other Figures the most perfect and most capacious: so the Triangle is most imperfect, and includes least space. It is the first and lowest of all Figures; for fewer then 3 right Angles cannot comprehend and include a superficies, having but 3 angles they are all acute (if it be equilaterall) and but equall to 2 *right*; in which respect all other regular Figures consisting of more then 3 lines, do exceed it.

(May not these be resembled to the 3 great compounded Elements in mans bodie, to wit, Salt, Sulphur and Mercurie, which mingled together make the naturall heat and radicall moysture, the 2 qualities whereby man liveth?) For the more lines that go to comprehend the Figure, the more and the greater the Angles are, and the nearer it comes to the

the perfection and capacitie of a Circle. A Triangle is compoſed of ſeverall lines, and they of Points, which yet do not make a quantitie by being contiguous to one another: but rather the motion of them doth deſcribe the lines. In like manner the Body of man is compounded of the foure Elements which are made of the foure primarie qualities, not compounded of them (for they are but Accidents) but by their operation upon the firſt matter. And as a Triangle hath three lines, ſo a ſolid Body hath three dimenſions, to wit, Longitude, Latitude and Profunditie. But of all bodies, Man is of the loweſt rank, (as the Triangle is among Figures) being compoſed of the Elements which make it liable to alteration and corruption. In which conſideration of the dignitie of bodies, I divide them by a generall diviſion, into ſublunarie (which are the elementated ones) and Æthereall, which are ſuppoſed to be of their own nature, incorruptible, and peradventure there are

ſome

ſome other *ſpecies* of corporeall ſubſtances, which is not of this place to diſpute.

O work divine!

Certainly of all Gods works, the nobleſt and perfecteſt is Man, and for whom indeed all others were done. For, if we conſider his *ſoul*, it is the very Image of God. If his *bodie*, it is adornd with the greateſt beautie and moſt excellent ſymmetry of parts, of any created thing: whereby it witneſſeth the perfection of the Architect, that of ſo droſſie mold is able to make ſo rare a fabrick: If his *operations*, they are free: If his *end*, it is eternall glory. And if you take *all together*, Man is a little world, an exact type of the great world, and of God himſelf. But in all this, me thinks, the admirableſt work is the joyning together of the two *different* and indeed *oppoſite* ſubſtances in Man, to make one perfect compound; the *Soul* and the *Body*, which are of ſo contrary a nature, that their *uniting* ſeems

to

to be a Miracle. For how can the one inform and work in the other, ſince there's no mean of operation (that we know of) between a ſpirituall ſubſtance and a corporeall? yet we ſee that it doth: as hard it is to find the true proportion betweene a Circle and a Triangle; yet, that there is a juſt proportion, and that they may be equall, *Archimedes* hath left us an ingenious demonſtration; but in reducing it to a Probleme, it fails in this, that becauſe the proportion between a crooked line and a ſtraight one, is not known, one muſt make uſe of a Mechanick way of meaſuring the *peripherie* of the one, to convert it to the ſide of the other.

„ *Theſe two the firſt and laſt proportions are.*

What I have already ſaid concerning a Circle and a Triangle, doth ſufficiently unfold what is meant in this verſe. Yet twill not be amiſſe to ſpeak one word more hereof in this place. All things that have exiſtence, may be divided into three

three *Classes*; which are, either what is pure and simple in it self, or what hath a nature compounded of what is simple, or what hath a nature compounded of what is compounded. In continued quantitie this may be exemplified by a Point, a line, and a superficies in Bodies: and in numbers, by an unity, a Denary, and a Centenary. The first, which is onely pure & simple, like an indivisible point, or an unity, hath relation onely to the Divine nature: That point then moving in a spherical manner (which serves to expresse the perfection of Gods actions) describes the Circles of our souls, and of Angels, and intellectuall substances, which are of a pure and simple nature, but receiveth that from what is so, in a perfecter manner, and that hath his, from none else. Like lines that are made by the flowing of points; or Denaries that are composed of Unities: beyond both which there is nothing. In the last place, Bodies are to be rankt, which are composedof the Elements: and they likewise

suffer

suffer compoſition, and may very well be compared to the loweſt of the Figures which are compoſed of lines, that owe their being to Points (and ſuch are Triangles) or to Centenaries that are compoſed of Denaries, and they of Unities. But if we will compare theſe together by proportion, God muſt be left out, ſince there is as infinite diſtance betweene the Simplicitie and Perfection of his nature, and the compoſition and imperfection of all created ſubſtances, as there is between an indiviſible Point and a continuate quantitie, or between a ſimple Unitie and a compounded number. So that onely the other two kinds of ſubſtance do enter into this conſideration: and of them I have already proved, that mans Soul is of the one the nobleſt, being dignified by hypoſtaticall Union (above all other intellectuall ſubſtances) and his elementated Body, of the other the moſt low and corruptible. Whereby it is evident, that thoſe two are the firſt and laſt Proportions, both in reſpect of

their own Figure, and of what they expreſſed.

" *The one imperfect, Mortall, Feminine:*
" *Th'other immortall, perfect, Maſculine.*

Mans Body hath all the proprieties of imperfect matter. It is but the Patient of it ſelf alone, it can do nothing: it is liable to corruption and diſſolution if it once be deprived of the form which actuates it, and which is incorruptible and immortall. And as the feminine Sex is imperfect, and receives perfection from the maſculine: ſo doth the Body from the Soul, which to it is in lieu of a male. And as in corporall generations the female affords but groſſe and paſſive matter, to which the Male gives active heat and prolificall vertue: ſo in ſpirituall generations (which are the operations of the minde) the body adminiſters onely the Organs, which if they were not imployed by the Soul, would of themſelves ſerve for nothing. And as therei

a mutuall appetence between the Male and the Female, betweene matter and forme; So there is betweene the bodie and the ſoul of Man, but what ligament they have, our Author defineth not (and it may be Reaſon is not able to attaine to it) yet he tels us what is the foundation that this Machine reſts on, and what keeps the parts together; in theſe words.

(*Baſe.*

"*And twixt them both, a Quadrate was the*

By which Quadrate, I conceive, that he meaneth the foure principall humors in mans Bodie, *viz. Choler*, *Blood*, *Phleme*, and *Melancholy*; which if they be diſtempered and unfitly mingled, diſſolution of the whole doth immediately enſue: like to a building which falls to ruine, if the foundation and Baſe of it be unſound or diſordered. And in ſome of theſe, the vitall ſpirits are contained and preſerved, which the other keep in convenient temper; and as long as they

do ſo, the ſoul and bodie dwell together like good friends: ſo that theſe foure are the Baſe of the conjunction of the other two, both which he ſaith, are

" *Proportion'd equally by ſeven and nine.*

In which words, I underſtand he meanes the influences of the ſuperior ſubſtances (which governe the inferiour) into the two differing parts of Man; to wit, of the *Starres* (the moſt powerfull of which, are the ſeven Planets, into his body: and of the Angels divided into nine Hierarchies or Orders) into his ſoul: which in his *Aſtrophel*, he ſaith is

" *By ſoveraigne choice from th'heavenly Quires ſelect,*
" *And lineally deriv'd from Angels race.*

And as much as the one governe the Body, ſo much the other do the Minde. Wherein is to be conſidered, that ſome

are

are of opinion, how at the inſtant of a childs conception, or rather more effectually at the inſtant of his Birth, the conceived ſperme or tender Body doth receive ſuch influence of the Heavens as then raigne over that place, where the conception or birth is made: And all the Starres or virtuall places of the celeſtiall Orbes participating the qualities of the ſeven Planets (according to which they are diſtributed into ſo many Claſſes, or the compounds of them) it comes to paſſe, that according to the varietie of the ſeverall Aſpects of the one and of the other, there are various inclinations and qualities in mens bodies, but all reduced to ſeven generall heads and the compounds of them, which being to be varied innumerable wayes, cauſe as many different effects, yet the influence of ſome one Planet continually predominating. But when the matter in a womans wombe is capable of a ſoul to informe it, then God ſendeth one from Heaven into it.

——— Eternall God,
In Paradise whilome did plant this Flower,
Whence he it fetcht out of her native place,
And did in Stock of earthly flesh inrace.

And this opinion the Author more plainly expresses himself to be of, in another work, where he saith:

There she beholds with high aspiring thought
The cradle of her own Creation;
Emongst the seats of Angels heavenly wrought.

Which whether it have been created ever since the beginning of the world, and reserv'd in some fit place till due time, or be created on emergent occasion; no man can tell: but certain it is, that it is immortall, according to what I said before, when I spake of the Circle which hath no ending, and an uncertain beginning. The messengers to conveigh which soul into the bodie, are the Intel-

ligence

ligences which move the Orbes of Heaven, who according to their ſeverall natures communicate to it ſeverall proprieties: and they moſt, who are Governours of thoſe Starres at that inſtant, who have the ſuperioritie in the planetary aſpects. Whereby it comes to paſſe, that in all inclinations there's much affinitie betweene the Soul and the Body, being that the like is betweene the Intelligences and the Starres, both which communicate their vertues to each of them. And theſe Angels, being, as I ſaid before, of nine ſeverall Hierarchies, there are ſo many principle differences in humane ſouls, which participate moſt of their proprieties, with whom in their deſcent they made the longeſt ſtay, and that had moſt active power to work on them, and accompanied them with a peculiar *Genius* (which is according to their ſeverall Governments) like the ſame kind of water that running through various conduits wherein ſeverall aromatike and oloriferous things are laid,

do acquire severall kinds of tastes and smels. For it is supposed, that in their first Creation, all Souls are alike, and that their differing proprieties arive to them afterwards when they passe through the spheres of the governing Intelligences. So that by such their influence, it may truly be said, that

"*Nine was the Circle set in Heavens place.*

Which verse, by assigning this office to the nine, and the proper place to the Circle, gives much light to what is said before. And for a further confirmation that this is the Authors opinion, read attentively the sixt *Canto* of the 3. Book, where most learnedly and at large he delivers the *Tenets* of this Philosophie; and for that. I commend to you to take particular notice of the 2d. and thirty two *Stanzaes*: as also the last of his *Epithalamion*: and surveying his works, you shall finde him a constant disciple of *Platoes* School.

"*All*

"*All which compacted, made a goodly Diapaſe.*

In Nature there is not to be found a more compleat and more exact Concordance of all parts, then that which is betweene the compaction and conjunction of the Body and Soul of Man: Both which although they conſiſt of many and moſt different faculties and parts, yet when they keepe due time with one another, they altogether make the moſt perfect Harmony that can be imagined. And as the nature of ſounds, that conſiſt of friendly conſonancies and accords, is to mingle themſelves with one another, and to ſlide into the eare with much ſweetneſſe, where by their unity they laſt a long time and delight it: where as contrarily, diſcords continually jarre, and fight together, and will not mingle with one another: but all of them ſtriving to have the victory, their reluctation and diſorder gives a ſpeedie

end

end to their ſounds, which ſtrike the Eare in a harſh and offenſive manner, and there die in the very beginning of their Conflict: In like manner, when a mans Actions are regular, and directed towards God, they become like the lines of a Circle, which all meet in the Center, then his muſick is moſt excellent and compleat, and all together are the Authors of that bleſſed harmony which maketh him happie in the glorious viſion of Gods perfections, wherein the minde is filled with high knowledges and moſt pleaſing contemplations; and the ſenſes, as it were, drowned in eternall delight; and nothing can interrupt this Joy, this Happineſſe, which is an everlaſting Diapaſe: Whereas on the contrary, if a mans actions be diſorderly, and conſiſting of diſcords, (which is, when the ſenſitive part rebels and wraſtles with the Rationall, ſtriving to oppreſſe it) then this muſick is ſpoiled, and inſtead of eternall life, pleaſure and joy, it cauſeth perpetuall death, horrour, paine

paine, and misery. Which infortunate estate the Poet describes elsewhere; as in the conclusion of this Staffe he intimates: the other happy one, which is the never-failing Reward of such an obedient bodie, and ethereall and vertuous minde, as he makes to be the seat of the bright Virgin *Alma*, mans worthiest inhabitant, *Reason*. *Her* I feele to speake within me, and chide me for my bold Attempt, warning me to stray no further. For what I have said (considering how weakly it is said) your Command is all the excuse that I can pretend. But since my desire to obey that, may bee seene as well in a few lines, as in a large Discourse, it were indiscretion in me to trouble you with more, or to discover to you more of my Ignorance. I will onely begge pardon of you for this blotted and interlined paper, whose Contents are so meane that it cannot deserve the paines of a Transcription, which if you make difficulty to grant to it, for my sake, let it obtain it for having been yours.

And

And now I return to you also the Book that contains my Text, which yesterday you sent me, to fit this part of it with a Comment, which peradventure I might have performed better, if either I had afforded my selfe more time, or had had the conventencie of some other books apt to quicken my Invention, to whom I might have been beholding for enlarging my understanding in some things that are treated here, although the Application should still have been my own: With these helps perhaps I might have dived further into the Authors Intention(the depth of which cannot be sounded by any that is lesse learned then he was) But I perswade my self very strongly, that in what I have said there's nothing contradictory to it, and that an intelligent and well learned man proceeding on my grounds might compose a worthie and true Commentarie on this Theme: Upon which I wonder how I stumbled, considering how many learned men have failed in the Interpretation

tation of it, and have all at the first hearing, approved my opinion.

But it was Fortune that made me fall upon it, when first this *Stanza* was read to me for an indissoluble Riddle. And the same Discourse I made upon it, the first halfe quarter of an houre that I saw it, I send you here, without having reduced it to any better form, or added any thing at all unto it. Which I beseech you receive benignely, as coming from

Your most affectionate Friend
and humble Servant,

Kenelm Digby.

FINIS.